

# Five Principles for Successful Range Development

Developing a giant facility can produce lessons even for much smaller ranges

By C. Douglas Nielsen

Imagine having 2,900 acres — 4.5 square miles — of undeveloped land at your disposal and the assignment to design and build a world-class shooting facility on that land, which happens to be just 30 minutes from Las Vegas — the world's entertainment capital — where entertainment facilities are expected to be larger-than-life.

Where would you start? What venues would you include?

That's the challenge Don Turner faced, as manager of the new Clark County Shooting Park (CCSP) being developed in southern Nevada.

"It's pretty staggering," said Turner, the former manager of Arizona's highly successful Ben Avery range. "It's like eating an elephant: you do it just one bite at a time, or you'll get sick."

Turner relies on five principles for range-development success and points out they're the same for ranges of all sizes

He recommends talking to others who have already been through the process.

"Find out the mistakes they made, what recommendations they make. Then get a paralegal to research local rules, laws and ordinances so you don't get slapped upside the head at the last minute by an ordinance or something you're totally unaware of."

Lorin Kramer is an experienced range architect and principal at Kramer One of Scottsdale, Ariz., the

## 1 FIRST PRINCIPLE: Determine what you want— and be specific

First, the developer needs a concrete idea of what he wants to offer the end user, from the types of shooting activities to the physical facilities.

"In the design phase, a range operator really has to know what he wants, because architects are very specific," said Turner. "If you say, 'I want a secure storage room because I want to rent guns and sell ammo,' the architect is going to ask you details regarding dimensions, air-conditioning needs or local fire codes for ammunition storage. Every little facet has got to be a conscious decision."

Those decisions are going to affect the design, which is going to affect the cost of the project as well as the number of personnel required to safely operate the range—the biggest area of overhead. Including an on-site cafeteria, for example, means also adding cooks, servers and other employees.

## 2 SECOND PRINCIPLE: Determine what you need

Determine what is needed in order to achieve your plan.

"The pitfalls of range design are mainly based around ignorance — not stupidity, but ignorance," said Turner.



ABOVE: To help demonstrate some things he wants to see in the future range, Don Turner, manager of the Clark County Shooting Park, takes his design team on a field trip to a neighborhood park.

BELOW: Members of the Clark County Shooting Park Advisory Board, along with the facility's architect, discuss ideas for the park's Western design theme—appropriate for a range built in the once-wild West.





firm contracted to design CCSP. He agrees with Turner and recommends that range developers become familiar with the National Rifle Association's (NRA) "Range Sourcebook" and attend that organization's Range Development and Operations Conference. Those who have done so "tend to be more savvy clients than someone who just calls me and has no clue as to what's going on at all," he said.

### 3 THIRD PRINCIPLE: Select the right design team

Select your design team very carefully. If possible, Turner said, hire an architect who knows shooting ranges or at least has some experience in designing venues similar to those you want to offer at your shooting range. For instance, if you plan on having a retail component, you may want an architect who has retail-designing experience.

"There are reputable range designers in this country who have gone through a lot of this before and can give you good advice," he said.

### 4 FOURTH PRINCIPLE: Monitor progress and costs

Monitor the progress of your design team at every step in the process and make sure your funding is being utilized wisely.

"I'll tell him [Kramer] I want a shaded canopy, but it's his job to design it. And then it's my job to make sure he's designing what I had in mind," explained Turner.

The design process can be very expensive, with engineering costs alone accounting for as much as 14 percent of the project costs — or more, says Turner. Failure to include those and other costs in their budgets sets up range managers for failure.

"When you're putting together your budget for designing and building your range, you can't just do it on construction costs because there are a ton of hidden costs in there. They can rise up to bite you if you don't really do good background homework on your cost estimate," said Turner. "If you haven't estimated the cost of the engineer, the cost

of permits, the cost of zoning or the cost of utility services, then all of a sudden you don't have enough money."

### 5 FIFTH PRINCIPLE: Cheaper may not be better

The last of Turner's principles for success is to make sure that bid requirements are written in such a way that you will be able to select contractors who will do a quality job.

Low-bid may not be the way to go, Turner warned.


"Sometimes the cheapest contractor isn't going to be the best," he said.

### Knowledge is power

With these five principles, Turner said, knowledge is key.

"You've got to know what you want and where you want to build it and learn as much as you can about

the environment you have to build in before you go out and start calling people."

Even with his extensive shooting facility design and development experience, Turner said he is still learning. 

*Putting together the right team to help determine how to implement what you want and what you need is essential. Here, Turner, left, discusses design themes with Mike Lussem (hat) and Chuck Musser, members of the Clark County Shooting Park Advisory Board.*



## Clark County Shooting Park: Shooting for 2008

Though the wheels of government turn slowly, there's been significant progress at Clark County Shooting Park (CCSP) in southern Nevada.

Manager Don Turner described the project as a 2,900-acre city.

"When we're done we'll have 22 buildings with 93,000 square feet under cover, 3.5 miles of roadway, 2.5 miles of sewer lines and three miles of water lines—and that's just some of the basics."

The CCSP Advisory Committee has chosen a Western theme for buildings, with lots of porches for lots of shade from the desert heat.

"It costs money, but it's for the comfort of our constituents."

Turner estimates that the design process is about half complete, despite an unanticipated setback related to the site's location "on the side of a mountain that floods significantly during the 100-year-flood period. Part of the initial work at the range includes building a flood-control structure across the entire length of the property. Some estimates place the cost of this structure at more than \$10 million—20 percent of Turner's estimated \$50 million budget.

Despite the setback, Turner has set the official groundbreaking for October 21, with preliminary grading beginning in early 2007.

"We're hoping to be shooting out there in January of 2008," he said.

